

Statement on the 45th Anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights March *March 7, 2010*

On this day, 45 years ago, hundreds of brave men and women gathered in the small town of Selma, Alabama, to announce to the world that they, too, sang America. As they marched from Selma to Montgomery, fully aware of the danger that lay ahead, these heroes let their feet speak in a way that their voices alone could not.

Today as we gather in this hallowed place on the anniversary of what would come to be known as Bloody Sunday, let us honor the memory of all those who were shoved and beaten within an inch of their lives because they believed in the simple truth that every American, regardless of race, had the right to cast a vote, had the right to live free, had the right to reach for their dreams.

It would take the marchers three tries to make it to Montgomery in March of 1965, and even longer to secure the rights they fought so hard for. Along the way, leaders were born, men like John Lewis, who endured taunts and beatings with the same quiet grace and dignity and determination that so many of us admire today. For Congressman Lewis and so many like him, no sacrifice was too great to make in freedom's cause.

The movement also had a partner in the White House, a President who declared "we shall overcome," and who understood that our Nation could not move forward as long as any of its citizens were held back. President Johnson helped deliver on that promise by signing the Voting Rights Act in August of that year, a law that aligned this Nation more closely with its founding ideals of justice and equality for all.

Today we stand on the shoulders of all the Moses generation that made the Voting Rights Act possible, that made the Civil Rights Act possible, that made the civil rights movement possible. Yet with all of the progress that has

been made since that terrible day in Selma, we also know that there is still much work to be done by us, the Joshua generation.

Since taking office, I have never forgotten that responsibility. That's why the first bill I signed as President helped ensure that never again will someone be forced to do the same work for less pay simply because of their gender. That's why we continue to give the Department of Justice, led by Attorney General Holder, the tools to protect voting rights and defend fair practices across our Nation. And that's why last month, we sought final resolution with the Nation's Black farmers who had suffered indignation for years because of the misguided actions of their Government.

But we must also remember that the mission at the heart of the civil rights movement was never simply about obtaining the right to sit at a lunch counter or ride on a bus. It was about giving Americans of every race, faith, and station the right to fulfill their God-given potential. That's why we are making unprecedented investments in the education of our children, in guaranteeing quality, affordable health care for every American, and in working to create good, well-paying jobs that will help build the economy of the 21st century.

So let us honor the men and women who marched into history so many years ago, both those who are with us today and those who long ago gave their lives to perfect our Union. Let us remember their courage in the face of danger and recommit ourselves to the journey ahead. Because I am confident that if we stand together in the Joshua generation, as the Moses generation did before us, then, in the words of a song we know so well, "We will face the rising Sun of a new day begun." Thank you.

Remarks in Glenside, Pennsylvania March 8, 2010

The President. Thank you. Hello, Pennsylvania! Thank you very much. This is a nice crowd. Thank you. Well, what a wonderful crowd.

Audience member. We love you!

The President. Love you back. I am—I'm kind of fired up. I'm kind of fired up. So listen, we—this is just an extraordinary crowd, and I—but—

Audience member. We love you!

The President. I love you back. I want—there's some people I want to point out who are here who've just been doing great work. First of all, give Leslie a great round of applause for her wonderful introduction.

Somebody who's been working tirelessly on your behalf, doing a great job, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, is in the house. One of the finest Governors in the country, Ed Rendell is in the house. Everybody notice how good Ed's looking, by the way? Huh? He's been on that training program, eating egg whites and keeping his cholesterol down. [*Laughter*]

Your senior Senator, who's just been doing outstanding work in the Senate, Arlen Specter's in the house. One of my great friends, somebody who supported me when nobody could pronounce my name, Bob Casey—in the house. Your Congressman, the person who gave me confidence that I could win even though nobody could pronounce my name, Chaka Fattah is in the house. I figured if they could elect a “Chaka”—[*laughter*—]then they could elect a “Barack.” [*Laughter*]

A couple of other outstanding Members of Congress—first of all, from Pennsylvania, Allyson Schwartz is in the house. Somebody who rendered outstanding service to our Nation before he was in Congress, Joe Sestak is in the house. One of the sharpest Members of Congress—technically not his State, but he—it's just from right next door, New Jersey, so he's practically—[*applause*]. See, we got some Jersey folks here—Rob Andrews in the house; and the great mayor of Philadelphia, Michael Nutter.

I'm a little warm here, so—all right. It's a little hot up here.

Audience member. To Arcadia.

The President. And to Arcadia University—[*applause*—]thank you, thank you guys for hosting us. I was asking about that castle on the way in, by the way. That's a—I thought the White House was pretty nice, but that castle, that's—[*laughter*].

Well, it is great to be back here in the Keystone State. It's even better to be out of Washington, DC. [*Laughter*] First of all, the people of DC are wonderful. They're nice people; they're good people; love the city, the monuments, everything. But when you're in Washington, folks respond to every issue, every decision, every debate, no matter how important it is, with the same question: Well, what does this mean for the next election? [*Laughter*] What does it mean for your poll numbers? Is this good for the Democrats or good for the Republicans? Who won the news cycle?

That's just how Washington is. They can't help it. They are obsessed with the sport of politics. And so that's the environment in which elected officials are operating. And you've seen all the pundits pontificating and talking over each other on the cable shows, and they're yelling and shouting. They can't help themselves. That's what they do.

But out here and all across America, folks are worried about bigger things. They're worried about how to make payroll. They're worried about how to make ends meet. They're worried about what the future will hold for their families and for our country. They're not worrying about the next election. We just had an election. They're worried about the next paycheck or the next tuition payment that's due. They're thinking about retirement. You want people in Washington to spend a little less time worrying about our jobs, a little more time worrying about your jobs.

Despite all the challenges we face—two wars, the aftermath of a terrible recession—I want to tell everybody here today, I am absolutely confident that America will prevail, that